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THE PRAYER  
OF  
OUR SAVIOUR  
FOR THE  
UNION  
OF  
HIS FOLLOWERS  
CONSIDERED;

A  
SERMON,

BY

WILLIAM M'GILL, A. M.

ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF AYR.

Gal. v. 13. By love serve one another.

GLASGOW:

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# THE PRAYER

OF

## OUR SAVIOUR

### CONSIDERED.

JHN xvii. 20, 21. NEITHER PRAY I FOR THESE ALONE, BUT FOR THEM ALSO WHICH SHALL BELIEVE ON ME, THROUGH THEIR WORD: THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE, AS THOU, FATHER, ART IN ME, AND I IN THEE; THAT THEY ALSO MAY BE ONE IN US: THAT THE WORLD MAY BELIEVE THAT THOU HAST SENT ME.

THIS is the solemn and earnest request, my brethren, which our divine Master, about to leave the world, addressed to Father, not only in behalf of the apostles, whom he had chosen to be the chief ministers of his kingdom, but likewise in behalf of all who should be brought to the faith, through their preaching and testimony, of which number we ourselves are. Of how much importance the union here mentioned was in his eyes, and how near it lay to his heart, may appear not only from the ardor of

his expressions, but from the distinguished place it holds in this intercessory prayer, and above all from the intimation he gives of the belief of his divine mission, or, which is the same thing, the progress of his religion among men, was to have an essential dependence on it. His first request for the apostles is, 'Holy Father! keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are (a);' and his first request for other believers is, 'That they may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in thee, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (b).'

Who is there then, brethren, among us who is assembled as we are this day\*, with a professed design to honour the memory of Jesus Christ, and to 'shew his death till he come (c).' What part is there of us? or who is he that bears the Christian name, and does not from the bottom of his soul (d) join in this prayer of the Son of God? and is not disposed to exert his utmost endeavours that it may be answered and fulfilled, so far as his influence can extend? Affuredly every one will do so, who has any sentiments of sincere love and religion.

(a) John xvii. 11. (b) John xvii. 21. (c) 1 Cor. 11. 26. (d) Mat. xii. 30.

\* Preached before the celebration of the Lord's supper.



*For the Union of his Followers Considered.* 3

the Lord Jesus remaining in his breast, or  
suitable concern to promote his interest  
the world.

What I propose, through divine assistance,  
discouraging farther on this interesting sub-  
ject, is only

1st, To explain the union which Jesus Christ  
prays for in behalf of his followers; or,  
enquire in what respects he desires that they  
be ONE. And then  
2dly, To shew the importance and neces-  
sity of this union among the professed follow-  
ers of Christ, for bringing the world to the  
fulfillment of his divine mission and doctrine.

That we may be in a better condition to  
offer our prayers, and labours, in this case, to  
our blessed Lord, I would endeavour;

1st place, To explain the union which he  
asks of his Father in our behalf, or, to  
enquire in what respects he desires that we  
be ONE.

Men may be one, no doubt, and often are  
in a very different sense from what is here  
intended. They may be one in nature, in  
blood, or affinity. They may be one in their  
interests and attachment to this present world;  
in their desire of riches, power or pleasure,  
they may be united in their political or par-  
tisan schemes. They may be associates in vice.

It is another sort of union which Jesus Christ desires for his disciples; a higher, and more holy union; an union resembling that which subsists between himself and his Father; namely, an union which may connect them, in the strictest manner, with his Father and himself, and finally, an union the effect of which would be, to convert the world to the Christian religion. These characters of it, which are plainly suggested in the text, will assist us to discover what the nature of it is. Now this blessed union, I apprehend, doth principally respect three things, of the utmost importance to the followers of Jesus, and through them to all mankind: namely, an union in the participation of the same divine spirit; an union in the faith and obedience of the same gospel; and lastly, an union of love and concord among themselves. I do not mean, that there are so many distinct parts, or ingredients, in the union which the Saviour of the world here prays for, for each one of them perhaps may be so taken as to include all the rest; but I mention them as so many different views under which this sacred union may be considered, and which will enable us more fully to understand it. Let us resume them in order, and

1st, Let us consider this union, which is the subject of our Saviour's intercession in

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(d) Joh

of his followers, as it respects their partaking in common of the same divine spirit. If the holy Spirit of God, which dwelt without measure in Jesus Christ his Son, was through him communicated, in due proportion, to those also who should believe on him, it is plain that these believers would be united at once to him, and his Father, and likewise to one another, by one and the same spirit possessing, and inspiring them.

Our Lord often argues, and proves the union between himself, and his Father, from these mighty works which he wrought 'thru' the Spirit of God (a),' or, 'which God did by him (b)'. If I do not the works of my Father, says he, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know I believe that the Father is in me, and I in him (c).' And again, the words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself; but the Father, that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; that ye may believe me for the very works sake (d).' And to the same purpose in other passages; the plain import of which is that men might, without thought to know, and be persuaded, that the Father, or the Spirit of the Father, was

(a) Mat. xii. 28. (b) Acts ii. 22. (c) John x. 37.

(d) John xiv. 10, 11.

in him, by the (a) words which he spake, and the works which he did; both of them evident demonstrations of (b) divine illumination and authority. The truth is, Jesus delivered his instructions, and performed all his works by the Spirit of God, which was not given by measure unto him. Hence it was manifest to all candid, and unprejudiced minds, that the Father's power, wisdom, holiness and dignity resided in him; that he was 'the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person (d),' or, 'God manifest in the flesh (e).' And hence he could truly say that 'whoever had seen him, had seen the Father,' and that 'he that hated him, hated his Father also (f).'

Accordingly, the union of Christians in their partaking all of the same Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and the Son, is often insisted on throughout the New Testament. 'Ye are built together, says the apostle Paul, into an habitation of God through the Spirit. There is one body, and one spirit, added even as ye are called in one hope of your Lord. Endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (g). For by one Spirit, we are all baptized into one baptism.

(a) Luke xxiv. 19. (b) Acts x. 38. (c) John i. 14. (d) Col. ii. 3. (e) Heb. i. 3. (f) 1 Tim. iii. 16. (g) Eph. ii. 22. iii. 3, 4.

whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (a).<sup>7</sup>

Now this communication of the divine Spirit to the members of Christ's body includes, as I conceive it, both those miraculous gifts and powers that were peculiar to the first Christians, and likewise those moral endowments, those saving influences from above, which have been in some measure imparted to good men in all ages, especially under the gospel, and which are common to the first Christians, and to us at this day. Of the former I shall say nothing at present, because, however proper or necessary they might be, at the beginning of the gospel, for (b) vindicating the cause of Christ, and convincing the world of his divine mission, they were not (c) intended for all ages of the church; and I should speak of this prayer of our Lord, only in as much as it concerns Christians of every age. In fact, my brethren, the supernatural powers and gifts that were imparted to the early Christian converts did not, of themselves alone, form a real or perfect union, either between those who received them, or between them and Christ. For he expressly (d) speaks of some who might prophesy, and cast out devils, and

(a) 1 Cor. xii. 13. (b) John xvi. 7.—12. (c) 1 Cor. 8. (d) Mat. vii. 22, 23.

do many wonderful works in his name, to whom nevertheless he will profess that he never knew them. (a) Nor would these extraordinary gifts have been sufficient to establish the faith of the gospel among unbelievers, if they had not been attended, in the new converts, with those moral effects of the divine Spirit, which ought also to be in us, and which were visible in their good temper and lives.

Our Lord assures us, from the affecting example of an earthly parent, how well disposed our heavenly Father is to 'give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him (b).' St. Paul prays for the Ephesian converts, probably after they had received miraculous gifts, 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give unto them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of their understanding being enlightened &c. (c) And that he would grant them, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man (d).' He exhorts them to 'walk as children of light; the fruit of the Spirit, says he, is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth (e).'

(a) 1 Cor. xiv. 23. 1 Pet. ii. 12.—16. Tit. ii. 1.

(b) Luke xi. 11.—13. (c) Eph. i. 17. (d) Eph. iii.

(e) Eph. v. 9.



man love me, says Christ, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him (*a*). Ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, says the apostle to the Romans, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his (*b*). And in innumerable other passages, the Spirit of God, or of Christ is spoken as the common and indispensable endowment of every good Christian. It is by this divine Spirit residing in us, and, in concurrence with the (*c*) right exercise of our rational faculties, and a faithful use of the word of God, (*d*) enlightning our understandings, (*e*) sanctifying our hearts, (*f*) supporting our weakness under afflictions and temptations, (*g*) and causing us to abound in all the virtues of a Christian life; it is by this Spirit alone, that we can be vitally (*h*) united to God or Christ, and (*i*) have fellowship with the Father and the Son. In proportion as we lose this Spirit, we languish, and die in the sight of God, and cease to have any real or solid principle of union either with him, or one ano-

(*a*) John xiv. 23. (*b*) Rom. viii. 9. (*c*) Luke xii. 57.  
43. 1 Thess. v. 21. 1 John iv. 1. (*d*) Neh. ix. 20.  
Gal. exliiii. 10. (*e*) 1 Cor. vi. 11. (*f*) Col. i. 10, 11.  
(*g*) Gal. v. 22, 23. 2 Cor. iii. 18. (*h*) John xv. 4. (*i*) 1 John



ther. But were we all possessed of a suitable portion of this celestial Spirit; not a (a) worldly, corrupt, blind, uncharitable spirit; but a spirit of light, of wisdom, of holiness and joy; a (b) spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind; (and if we have not this spirit we are much to blame) then our whole conduct would be worthy of God, and agreeable to him. We would be all as one body animated by one soul, God would have constant intercourse and society with us; and it would be the main study of us all to fulfil each other (c) joy in the Lord. And this is the first view which I mentioned of the union our divine Saviour prays for to us. Let us proceed to what was observed in the

2d place, As the subject of this earnest intercession of his in behalf of his followers; I mean that they might be ONE in the faith and obedience of his doctrine. For such must we be, my brethren, if our union is to bear a resemblance to that of Christ and his Father, and if we would be one in them.

As the Father dwelt in Jesus Christ, by the fulness of his Spirit, so Jesus was in the Father, by his exact and punctual observance of the Father's instructions, and by his doing always those things that were acceptable in his

(a) John xiv. 17. (b) 2 Tim. i. 7. (c) Rom. xiv. 17

ht; so that in establishing the law or doctrine of the gospel, and in accomplishing the and scheme of man's redemption thereby, he and his Father were, and ever will be, the same. Hence we find such declarations as these, often, and so solemnly repeated by our Lord, in the course of his ministry. 'My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me (b). I have not spoken of myself, but the Father which sent me, he gave me commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak (c). I do nothing of myself, but as the Father hath taught me, I speak these things; and he that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him (d).'

Jesus therefore, so faithful himself in (e) teaching the truth which he had received from his Father, and in (f) giving testimony to it by his whole life and actions, and even his blood, was justly (g) solicitous that his followers should be united in the profession and practice of it; adhering to it with unshaken constancy, whatever troubles it might expose them to in the world, and preserving his precious (h) treasure, brought them from

(a) John x. 25.—38. (b) John vii. 16. (c) John 49. (d) John viii. 28, 29. (e) Mat. xxii. 16. (f) John 37. 1 John v. 6. (g) John xv. 5.—7. Mat. x. 27.—  
(h) 2 Cor. iv. 7.

above, pure and uncorrupted by any foreign mixtures. Without this, they would be as little one as the rest of the world, of whom the Jews and Gentiles were at irreconcilable variance, and the Gentiles moreover divided among themselves by innumerable and endless superstitions. Whereas it was his design to bring men together upon the affairs of religion, and to give them, at the same time, one spirit to animate them, and one faith to enlighten and direct them. And by uniting the obedience of this faith, as taught by him, they would be one in the Father and him.

It was indeed highly desirable that his followers should all concur in the same views and sentiments concerning his doctrine, and that, as the apostle speaks, they should be 'perfectly joined together in the same mind' and in the same judgment (a), upon the same head. And since the inspired apostle so often makes this unity of sentiment in religion the subject of his precepts and exhortations, cannot be thought a thing impracticable in itself, however much it may be so, by the methods that have been usually taken to promote it. If it were in itself impossible to be attained, how could so many apostles and prophets have agreed in delivering to us the same doctrine?

(a) 1 Cor. i. 10. (b) 2 Cor. xiii. 11. Phil. ii. 2. Rom. xv. 5, 6. (c) Eph. ii. 20.

ne? How could it be the duty of Christi-  
s to endeavour to be agreed in the belief of  
And let me add, how could it be their  
ry to seek the (a) knowledge of the truth,  
it is in Jesus? For whereas there are a  
ousand different ways of error, the truth,  
all must allow, lies in one point; and there-  
re, as far as men are in possession of the  
th, so far they are, and necessarily must  
of one mind. Two persons may agree,  
d be both wrong; they may likewise differ,  
d be both wrong; but they cannot differ  
on the same thing, and be both right.  
nce it follows, that though Christians may  
agreed in error, yet in the truth there must  
an agreement among them: the one is al-  
ys in exact proportion to the other; and  
y are not more obliged to understand their  
igion, or any part of it truly, than they are,  
be of the same judgment upon it. And if  
ristians were always to keep in mind one  
at principle which they all profess, and to  
ow it with honesty, humility and candour  
all its just and obvious consequences; that  
o say, if filled with the (b) love of truth and  
ue for its own sake, without regard to any  
worldly considerations, or selfish interests,

(a) Eph. iv. 21. 2 Tim. iii. 7. (b) John xviii. 27.  
John ii. 15. Phil. ii. 21. iii. 18, 19. 2 Thess. ii. 10.  
v. 44.

they would resolve simply to learn from Jesus Christ, their common (a) Lord and Master, and setting aside all other authority matters of religion, to make his words, and those of his inspired apostles, the sole rule of their thoughts and actions; freely (b) communicating their sentiments to each other, on every occasion offered, for their mutual edification but never pretending to (c) dictate or impose on them; perhaps it might be more difficult for them to (d) differ, in any material point of Christianity, than to agree. Some of them might have higher measures of knowledge of the Christian doctrine than others; but it is probable there would be no considerable diversity or opposition amongst them, even in sentiment or opinion. Nor do these prerequisites to union of judgment which I have now mentioned contain any thing in them that is very great or extraordinary, or beyond the reach of humanity. They are but the common duties of our religion, my brethren; nothing more than what all Christians are bound to every day of their lives, and what they all acknowledge the obligation of.

However it be, this was certainly agreeable to the mind and will of Christ, and this I doubt he prayed for, as far as the darkness

(a) Mat. xviii. 8.—11. (b) Eph. iv. 15. 1 Pet. iv. 10.  
(c) 2 Cor. x. 24. 1 Pet. v. 3. (d) James iv. 1.

and infirmity of our present state might admit of it. For upon this depends, in a great measure, the internal strength and perfection of the Christian church, as well as her increase or enlargement without: according to what the great apostle of the Gentiles teaches us, when he says, (a) that Christ, after his ascension up on high, distributed various gifts to men, making some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. For what end? 'For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.' This is what we should all seek after.

Nevertheless it is hardly to be expected, in this state, that all Christians should agree exactly in every point and principle of religious belief; and the reason is, because it is not to be expected, that they should all attain to the precise truth in every thing, and be absolutely free from error. We are frail, and short-sighted, and liable to mistake, the best of us, though we had no prejudices, passions or interests to mislead us. Nor are all mens minds

(a) Eph. iv. 7.---15.



formed alike, any more than their bodies. Difference of natural capacity or gifts, difference of education and habit, difference of opportunities for acquiring knowledge, difference of study or application; all these, and many other circumstances, will naturally occasion a diversity of sentiments (some more and others less just) even where men follow all the same rule, and are all equally sincere. But then the experience of all ages hath shewn that upon the supposition mentioned, this diversity is apt to take place chiefly, if not wholly, in such matters as are less clear, less easy to be ascertained with precision, and therefore comparatively of less importance. Nor is this inconsistent with the unity of the evangelical faith, while men remain all on the same and only (a) foundation, which is Jesus Christ; and all (b) hold him as their head; united in a due respect to his divine authority, so fully manifested, and proved by his life, preaching and miracles, his death and resurrection from the dead; while they are all persuaded of his exaltation to power at the right hand of God, and that he will come again to judge the world, and render to every man according to his works; I add, while they are all persuaded of the mercy of God, through him, and

(a) 1 Cor. iii. 11.

(b) Col. ii. 18, 19.

that he will give eternal life to all them, and them only that obey him. This faith is sufficient to constitute men Christians, and to entitle them to all the privileges of Christians, as may evidently appear from all the conversions which the scripture relates to have been made by the apostles of our Lord, while they spread the gospel through the world (*a*). And in this faith, most part, if not all Christians, at least in the reformed churches, do at this day profess unanimously to agree. The grand error, and the source of endless divisions is, when Christians (*b*) professing this faith in common, do not act conformably to it, or will not suffer one another to do so in peace; and when quarreling about lesser differences of opinion, often very trifling, often lying rather in (*c*) words than things, they forget to concur with (*d*) God, with Jesus Christ, and with one another, in promoting to the utmost of their power, that holiness, righteousness and solid piety, which the gospel every where inculcates, in the clearest manner, and under the most solemn sanctions. Which brings me to the

(*a*) See Acts ii. 36, 38. viii. 37. x. 39, 44. xvi. 31. ii. 3, 31. See also Mat. xvi. 13, 18. John vi. 68, 69. xi. 41, 42. xx. 21. 1 John v. 1. Rom. x. 9. (*b*) Tit. i. Heb. xii. 14. Rom. xxv. 19. xii. 18. (*c*) 1 Tim. i. 6. 4, 5, 20. (*d*) Tit. ii. 11. 15.

3d and last view which I mentioned of the union so devoutly prayed for by Jesus Christ in behalf of all that should at any time become his followers; namely, an union of concord and mutual love: that as the Father is in him and he in the Father, and as he and his Father are one, by the strictest and most perfect (a) love, and by their joint endeavours (if we may say so) to carry on, and compleat the grand work of man's eternal salvation; so we Christians also might be one in them, by a charity founded on the pure and sublime principles of the gospel. This is properly the result and fruit of all that I have hitherto discoursed of. For what was the intention of the Almighty Father in communicating his Spirit to the Son, and through him, to the disciples of the Son? What was his intention in calling them to one faith, the profession and practice of one divine religion, putting them under the conduct of one heavenly Master, and giving them one common hope of an incorruptible inheritance! What did he intend by these things, but that strife and discord ceasing from amongst them, and the odious distinctions which had formerly kept them in variance being abolished, 'there might be neither Jew, nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian,

(a) John x. 17. xiv. 31. xvii 4, 23, 26. (b) Eph. ii. 1, 7.

thian, bond or free, but all might be ONE in Christ Jesus (a)?' And (b) what did it propose to them to have even the miraculous gifts of the Spirit if they had not charity? Or what did it entail, to be the followers of one holy doctrine, if this doctrine, instead of uniting them, was to be the source of greater dissension and animosity between them, than they had ever known before? We cannot doubt then, but it was the aim of our Saviour's intercession in heaven at least, if not principally, that his followers might be one in mutual love towards each other. For without this, whatever other things they might agree in, their union could have no means be compleat, secure or lasting; their union, I mean, either with him and his Father, or among themselves.

Accordingly, the apostle Paul teacheth us that the 'end of the commandment (the scope and tendency, the sum and perfection of the Christian institution) is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned (c).' Where these are, charity can never be wanting; and where charity is wanting, there can neither be undissembled faith, nor a good conscience, or a pure heart. 'If we love one another, says the apostle John, God dwelleth in us, and his love is per-

(a) Gal. iii. 26, 29. (b) 1 Cor. xiii. 1. (c) 1 Tim. i. 5.

'fected in us (a).' In short, this is the character by which Jesus would have men to be known in the world for his disciples. The disciples of the Pharisees were known by their dress, their extraordinary devotions, their perciliousness; the disciples of (c) John the Baptist were known by their fasting, and the singular austerity of their manners; the disciples of the Heathen philosophers were known by their attachment to the opposite systems, and speculative opinions of their respective masters. Jesus Christ fixes upon nothing of that kind for the distinctive badge of his followers. He assigns something for that is more useful and salutary, more agreeable to truth and reason, and more conducive to the real perfection and happiness of human nature. 'By this, says he, shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (d).'

Our Lord, I say, prayed for this most excellent grace to his followers (e) above others, in praying for their union; because this grace alone could make them truly and completely ONE. This would prevent or remove every possible cause of discord or dissension that might arise among them. It would

(a) 1 John iv. 12. (b) Mat. xxiii. 5, 7. (c) Mat. 14. (d) John xiii. 35. (e) 1 Pet. iv. 8. Col. iii. 14.

(a) conjoined in holy communion and peace, notwithstanding unavoidable differences of sentiment in some things; and render them one compact and firm body, in which we can perceive no rent, or schism, but close-knit together, in all its parts, and edifying itself in love.

But we have now seen, according to the account that I am able to give of it, from scriptures of truth, what it is that Jesus Christ here asks in behalf of those who should believe on his name, when he prays, 'that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one with us!' How far this prayer has been hitherto answered in fact, it may not become me to say; though it must be owned that appearances in the world at this day, and for many ages past, are very much against it. But the thing we may say, that if it had been answered in a much less degree than it has been, there would be no just argument, either against the propriety of the prayer in itself, or against the efficacy of our Lord's intercession with his Father. For it is with the (b) answer of this prayer in us, my brethren, as with all the other blessings which the gospel proposeth to us: God has not made our (c) attainment of

(a) Eph. iv. 15, 16. (b) 1 Cor. xiii. 3. (c) John v. 40.



them to depend only upon himself, or the mediation of his Son. Were that the case, we would have nothing to (a) fear, and need not give ourselves any trouble about them. But he has made it to depend also, and essentially upon us; in so much that without the concurrence of our desires, our prayers, and (b) efforts for obtaining them, and making them ours, we can reap no benefit from them, and they are as (c) vain with regard to us, if they had never existed; except only that they will (d) increase the severity of our condemnation.

What ought powerfully to excite our endeavours in the present case, is the consideration of the importance and necessity of the union which our Saviour prays for among professed followers, in order to engage the believing world to receive the faith of his vine mission, or to embrace his religion. 'That the world may believe that thou hast sent me.' This was

II. The second point that I proposed to consider; and having been so long detained upon the former head, I must, for the sake of your time, satisfy myself with a brief and general illustration of this, 'That the world may believe that thou hast sent me!' It

(a) Phil. ii. 12, 13. Heb. iv. 1. (b) 1 Tim. vi.  
(c) 2 Cor. vi. 1. (d) Mat. xi. 20, 24. Heb. ii. 1, 4.

our Lord that says so, my brethren; and what Christian! what lover of Jesus, but must be affected with this motive? Blessed Jesus! and is it so indeed? Is there danger that the world will not believe that God hath sent thee? That after all the glorious attestations that have been given to thy innocence and dignity, both from heaven and on earth, they will still hold thee for a false and infamous impostor? That they will approve of the (a) council which condemned thee as a blasphemer, and of the (b) wicked hands that nailed thee to the cross? That they will crucify thee afresh, and put thee to open shame (c)? Above all, canst thou be liable to such treatment on account of any thing in the character and conduct of thy professed disciples? What shall I do, O my Lord, to vindicate thy honour? to rescue thy (d) worthy name, in which I must for ever glory, from the unjust reproaches of infidels? How shall I take away from them every pretext to justify their unbelief? and cause thee to be thought of, wherever thy name is heard, with that respect and veneration which is due to thee as the faithful (e) messenger of the most High, and the (f) anointed Lord and King of his people? You know the answer,

(a) Mat. xxvi. 65, 66. (b) Acts ii. 23. (c) Heb. vi.

(d) Jam. ii. 7. (e) Mal. iii. 1. John viii. 12. xvii.

(f) Acts iv. 27. v. 31.

my brethren, that Jesus Christ would give to such pious enquirers. I presume you have already conceived it. Would it not be to this purpose? 'Be careful, my dear friends, to  
 ' live as becomes my disciples, and let the distinguishing characteristic of my disciples prevail,  
 ' veil, and be conspicuous in you—study to  
 ' be ONE—as the Father is in me, and I in  
 ' him—to be ONE in us—endeavour—strive  
 ' —exhort—(a) if there be any consolation in  
 ' me, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship  
 ' of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies—  
 ' (b) exhort and (c) provoke one another to  
 ' heavenly union and love. So shall you persuade  
 ' the world that I am (d) the faithful  
 ' and true witness, and that (e) my religion  
 ' of God.'

But, to set this matter in a clearer light, must be owned, Christians, that the divinity of our religion does not properly depend upon the behaviour of its professors. Without regard to that, it has proofs to support it which are abundantly sufficient to convince and satisfy the minds of all impartial persons who know, and consider them. But then, let the proofs of it be what they will, it is impossible they can produce any effect, where they are not attended to, and examined, without

(a) Phil. ii. 1. (b) Heb. iii. 13. (c) Heb. x. 24.  
 (d) Rev. iii. 14. (e) John xiv. 24.

(a) prejudice. Nor can it be reasonably expected that unbelievers will be very solicitous to know the evidences of a religion, which they are yet strangers to, and which they perceive to have few, or no good (b) effects upon those who have already received it, and profess to be governed by it. No. On the contrary, this will naturally fill their minds with the strongest prejudices, and will, in their apprehension, weaken, or totally destroy the force of all the arguments that can be produced in favour of it. In this way it is that the manners of professed Christians come to be of so much consequence to others, and to have such a mighty influence, either in promoting or obstructing the progress of their religion among men. Our Lord seems to intimate that there is something essential in this matter. He had already preached an excellent and heavenly doctrine, lived a spotless and exemplary life, and wrought many great miracles which could not be disputed by those who had the best opportunities to examine them; he was in a little time to seal the truth with his blood; to rise again from the dead, according to his promise; to shew himself alive, after his passion, to his apostles and followers who were, of all others, the fittest to

(a) John viii. 43, 47. (b) 1 Tim. vi. 1.

judge of the reality of that fact; to ascend up to heaven in their presence; and to pour down upon them a rich variety of the most extraordinary gifts and powers, enabling them to speak with new tongues, and to do miraculous works; all which he did faithfully perform: and yet, as if all these things would of themselves be insufficient to convince the world of his divine mission, he prays here for those who should believe in him, 'that they may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us' 'that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.'

In fact, my brethren, the general conduct and deportment of those who make profession of the Christian religion is naturally the first point relating to it that will come to be examined by strangers and infidels whom it is proposed to. This is an obvious thing, and strikes at first light, and must always give, from the very nature of man, the most obstinate prepossessions either for, or against any doctrine. All men are endowed with a sense of right and wrong, and it is from the known behaviour of Christians, that the heathens will form their judgments both of them, and of their religion. Many men also, even in the midst of Pagan superstition, have so much knowledge of the Divinity, as to think that,

is at all to reveal his will to men, it must with a view to make them just and faithful, false and cruel, and to unite and cement, to set them at variance.

Now let us suppose there is such an one, as a heathen, and enemy to our religion, but whom you would persuade to receive it as the will of God. He opens his eyes upon the Christian world; and instead of one grand and happy society worthy of the great God to form, and fit for him to dwell with, beholds an infinite multitude of little factions and parties, separate from, and opposite to each other; each claiming to be the only true Christians, and all denying that character to every other sect themselves; unwilling to acknowledge any other for the followers of the same Master; unable to bear with one another in the fellowship of God, the common Father of all; full of rancour and animosity in their hearts, restrained only by want of power from persecuting each other, even to destruction---What sects do you imagine would naturally arise in his breast, concerning the religion we profess, and the Master whom we serve? Ah! brethren, it must wound every Christian to see, only to think of them. He would ask, with disdain, which of these hostile parties he is to enlist himself with? for one or other of them, he will think, he must join, if



he is to be a Christian. But in his present position, as a heathen, he wishes no ill to any of his fellow creatures, who do not invade his rights; and why should he involve himself in unnecessary broils and quarrels? If it be acknowledged that these wars are waged, and carried on in the cause of heaven, he will wonder in the first place, how heaven should come to have so many opposite and contradictory causes to maintain at once? and then, how it should come to stand in need of the feeble efforts of human wrath and violence to assert its interests? He would ask you, whether Jesus Christ intended to establish one religion for his disciples, or a number of different ones. If the latter was his design, he will say, it seems to have succeeded, but then what is the religion you call the Christian religion? If the former, how comes it to pass that his followers are in fact of so many different religions? Did he himself understand what he intended to appoint? And did he know how to express it? It would seem not, will the heathen say, since his disciples cannot agree in saying what his religion is. You call the church of Christ his kingdom, and you say that he who is king of it has all (a) power in heaven and earth. But while I, says the infidel, beh

(a) Mat. xxviii. 18.

kingdom so much divided against itself, I  
must conclude that it is, some how or other,  
ill administer'd, and that the head of it  
wants either the power, or the will to reduce  
it to order and peace. Did he intend to sow  
the seeds of eternal strife and discord among  
his subjects? and to set up a kingdom, wherein his  
subjects should always pursue opposite inte-  
rests in his name? and be perpetually hating  
and devouring one another for his sake \*?  
I forbear, my brethren, to express all the  
reproaches and blasphemies, which the  
world will be apt to pour out upon our ho-  
nourable religion, and its founder, while they see the  
Christian world split into such a multitude of  
opposite and contending parties, all intent up-  
on each others ruin; and that in those places †  
where there seems to be the greatest unifor-  
mity among them, matters are still a great  
deal worse; because it is not a real uniformity,  
only apparent; an uniformity not owing  
to choice or conviction, but to the grossest ig-  
norance and hypocrisy; supported only by the  
constant exertion of an oppressive worldly  
power, which either industriously keeps them  
in the dark, or else forces them to dissemble

See a Sermon of the Reverend Mr. James Pierce of  
Boston on 1 Cor. i. 13.

\*) Rom. ii. 24.

† In Popish countries.

their real sentiments, and to profess outwardly what their hearts abhor.

Upon the whole, will the heathen say, there is a set of men who all profess to follow the Master only in the things of religion, and in fact each party follows another of their own; a set of men who say they belong to one body, and yet are formed into a thousand separate bodies, which all disclaim communion with one another; a set of men in fine, whom a stranger would take to be all of one religion (for they all call themselves Christians) yet their religion, even according to their own accounts of them, are as different as light and darkness. What a contradiction must the Christians be! and what must be the doctrine that inspires them with such sentiments, and leads them to such a conduct! Is it possible that it can descend from above, as they pretend?

But an intelligent heathen, before he can be brought to attend without prejudice to the nature or evidences of our religion, will be apt to carry his enquiries into the manner of its professors somewhat farther still; and from this general view of the Christian world, he will turn his eyes to the moral conduct and deportment of particular persons; and when he finds that great numbers at least, if not the bulk of Christians of all persuasions, and

those of them who make the greatest noise about their religion, are as sensual, as covetous, as revengeful, as treacherous and cruel, as the (a) heathens themselves, he will ask why he should be desired to embrace a religion which, if it does not make him worse, is not likely to make him any better than he is already. Christians, he observes, profess mainly to (b) seek the happiness of another world, while most of them appear to be entirely devoted to the interests and pleasures of this. If any are otherwise minded, they are but few in comparison, and are generally laughed at by the rest, as fools and enthusiasts. In short they do not follow the principles and maxims of their own religion, which is an argument that they themselves do not believe it. And though they affect to have great zeal for bringing others to the belief of it, and pretend to have no other view in this but a desire of promoting the welfare of their fellow-creatures, and of making them eternally happy, it is manifest from their conduct that religion with them is nothing but a mere pretence to cover their base and sinister designs, that they regard it no farther than as a means of extending their empire over others, and of possessing themselves of their treasures.

1 Pet. i. 13, 16. Eph. iv. 17, 32. v. 8. (b) Mat. vi. 33. Col. iii. 2.

Thus, I say, will heathens and enemies argue against our religion from the conduct of its professors, and these arguments will be many strong and invincible prejudices in their minds, sufficient to make them despise it, and refuse to take any farther trouble in examining either what it is in itself, or by what evidences its divine authority is supported. There have been many attempts made by Christians to propagate the gospel in foreign parts, and many schemes set on foot for the conversion of heathens and infidels: pious, I doubt not, and well meant: but for my part, the more I consider the subject now before us, together with the history of past ages, the less hope I allowed to entertain of the gospel's being propagated with any great success abroad, or once it be better propagated at home, or seeing strangers submit willingly to the yoke of Jesus Christ, whilst it is born with bad a grace by so many of his pretended friends; and particularly, whilst there is little UNION among Christians with regard to their common faith. Christians ought to proceed with some kind of (*b*) consistency. They should first settle and compose their differences among themselves, before they pretend to spread that 'gospel of peace' (*c*) which the

(*a*) Mat. xi. 30. (*b*) Mat. vii. 5. (*c*) Rom. x. 15. (*d*) Heb.

profess among foreigners: they should be generally agreed what their religion is, before they undertake to (a) teach it to those who are entirely unacquainted with it: in a word, they should shew by their (b) actions that they themselves are really influenced by the faith of it, before they attempt to make others believe it. Then indeed, we might justly hope for the happiest fruits, and for greater triumphs to our religion than it hath had for many ages, but not sooner.

If all that call themselves Christians would agree to live according to the (c) rules of their religion, which are not less clear, than excellent; if they would bend their chief attention to the things in which they all agree, and which they themselves must allow to be of greatest importance, rather than to those in which they happen to differ; if instead of affecting to distinguish themselves by insolent pretensions to orthodoxy of opinion (which is only paying a compliment to themselves at the expence of their brethren) they would rather study to be known by the principal and leading mark which Jesus Christ hath assigned for his disciples, their love one to another; finally, if each party of Christians, instead of endeavouring to swallow up, and destroy the

(a) Heb. v. 12. (b) Rom. ii. 21. (c) Mat. v. 12.



rest, by means of the power or policy of the world, would agree to lay aside the little, or if you will, the great peculiarities by which they stand apart from each other, and to unite upon the broad and firm basis of the 'everlasting gospel,' (a) contained in the books of the New Testament, the only records of it which they allow to be of divine authority; hearkening with one consent to the voice of their common Master, (b) learning of him who was meek and lowly in heart, speaking the truth to one another in love, and endeavouring (c) kindly to set each other right where they think they are wrong, but never attempting to (d) force from others a submission to their sentiments without inward conviction; not (e) judging or censuring, nor hurting or molesting one another, upon account of mere differences of opinion, which at the worst can be only errors in judgment from which no man is entirely exempted; could we see this temper and spirit prevailing among Christians, we might yet hope that the (f) gospel of Christ would have free course, and be glorified in the world. The truth would get fair play. The (g) name of Christ would be no longer blasphemed among

- (a) Rev. xiv. 6. (b) Mat. xi. 29. (c) 2 Tim. ii. 26. (d) 2 Cor. i. 24. (e) Rom. xiv. 4, 5. Jam. xv. 12. (f) 2 Thess. iii. 1. (g) 2 Thess. i. 12.

models on account of the scandalous immoral  
behaviour of his professed followers. All (a)  
prejudices against our religion arising from  
that quarter would be happily removed. The  
light of genuine Christianity shining before  
them, in the lives of its professors, would al-  
ready irresistibly invite and engage them to  
glorify our heavenly Father. The (c) bless-  
ing of God would attend their endeavours to  
propagate it. And this divine religion, seen in  
its native un sullied lustre, and in its most saluta-  
ry and beneficial effects, would gradually pre-  
vail over the whole earth. Then, in the em-  
phatic language of the prophet, (d) 'ten men  
of all the nations would take hold of  
the skirt of him that is a Christian, saying,  
'we will go with you; for we have heard that  
God is with you.' \*

in this (e) manner was the Christian religi-  
on propagated in its early days; and if so, we  
have reason to think it will never be propa-  
gated successfully any other way. Whilst (f)  
the disciples continued stedfastly in the apostles  
doctrine and fellowship, praising God, and  
enjoying favour with all the people; whilst  
they were wont to assemble together with one

1 Tim. v. 14. Tit. ii. 8. (b) Mat. v. 13, 16.

Mat. xxviii. 19, 20. (d) Zech. viii. 23. (e) Mat. xii.

(f) Acts ii. 42, 46, 47.

See two Sermons of Dr. Clarke on 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

(a) accord, being of one heart, and one soul, and in the great grace was upon them all. And in the days the churches were (b) edified in themselves, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, they were multiplied also, by a numerous accession of new converts coming in every day. But strifes and contentions arose in some churches\*, they never carried them so far as to renounce (c) communion with one another, they were prevailed upon by farther instruction in the principles of Christianity to bring them aside. If some (d) corrupt men appeared, now and then among them, who sought worldly ends, endeavoured to subvert or corrupt the Christian faith, 'and would not be sent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine which is according to godliness,' (e) they were presently shunned and discountenanced by all the friends of Jesus. Christianity in the mean time (f) spread and flourished, Christians were every where distinguished by their mutual love, by the reasonableness of their worship, and the purity of their manners. The converts from among the Gentiles

(a) Acts xv. 32, 33. (b) Acts ix. 31. (c) 1 Cor. 20. (d) Rom. xvi. 17, 18. (e) 1 Tim. vi. 3, 5. (f) Acts xix. 20.

\* The church of Corinth, for example.

generally of one mind in the Christian  
doctrine, and though they could not but have  
different sentiments in some things from  
Jewish converts, having been at so wide a  
distance from them before; yet even these  
parties united in (a) one body under Je-  
sus Christ, and the main (b) controversy of  
all was only with Pagans and idola-

But when Christians became less apprehen-  
sive of the common enemy, than of one ano-  
ther; when they began (which was too early  
indeed) to (c) adulterate the pure religion of  
Jesus, with additions and inventions of their  
own, on which they laid more stress than on  
the words, and to turn the gospel into an (d)  
useless and barren speculation, instead of re-  
garding it as a (e) plain, affecting and edifying  
mode of life; when the churches were no long-  
er known by their mutual love, but by loud  
controversies about heresy and orthodoxy; when  
persecuted Christians, the world began  
to see those (f) monstrous things called Chri-  
stian Persecutors; when human force and  
violence succeeded to reason and argument,  
the propagation and defence of the truth,  
were exerted by Christians not only a-

(a) Eph. ii. 15, 18. (b) Mat. x. 34, 35. (c) 2 Thess. ii.  
ii. 8. (d) 1 Tim. i. 3, 4. 2 Tim. ii. 23. (e) Mat.  
23, 26. (f) Luke ix. 55, 56. John xvi. 1, 4.

gainst infidels, but against their fellow Christians; when men were to be convinced by heavy forfeitures, and by bodily pains and tortures, instead of meek persuasion and friendly debate; to conclude, when Christians would no longer allow their brethren and fellow-servants to be subject to the authority of Christ the common Lord of them all, would moreover compel them, by the terror of this world, to be subject also to their authority in the things of religion—From that time, my brethren, and by these means, the body of Christ being no longer ONE, but broken in a thousand pieces, his religion declined every day. Its glory was debased, its force corrupted, its very light almost extinguished. Ignorance, hypocrisy and trifling ceremonies and human contrivance came to take place of honesty and understanding, of solid piety and undiffembled love. Scarce any vestige of Christianity remained in the world, at least that noble simplicity which is natural to it, except in the books of sacred scripture, which were preserved indeed, but prohibited from common use. We are, by God's blessing, delivered from that deplorable darkness and stupidity, but are still, it is to be feared, a great way from Christian perfection.

These things however, may serve in some measure to convince us, of how much importance it is that the professed followers of Christ be ONE, in order that the world may be persuaded of his divine mission, and engaged to embrace his religion. And we may now perceive how necessary a connection there is between these two great events.

What remains then, Christians, but that in order to obtain the inestimable benefit which Jesus Christ here prays for to us, and that we may not counteract his blessed intercession in our behalf, and deprive ourselves of the fruits of his mediation; that we may not be the occasion of causing him to be regarded by the world as an impostor, and his religion as a fiction of human device; what remains, I say, but that we strive to be (a) like-minded, and join our best endeavours to promote all Christian holiness in ourselves, and others, especially union and love? It is not in our power indeed to unite all men, or to reconcile them to one another, any more than to the truth. But let us lament the disorders which we cannot cure, and commend the cure of them to the wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father. Who knows how far the (b) united prayers and tears of

(a) Philip. ii. 2. (b) Mat. xviii. 19, 20. James v. 16.



a single church, animated by the Spirit of Christ, may go towards the benefit of the whole Christian world? Above all, let us have examples of that holy UNION and peace which ought to reign among all Christians; even preserving and cherishing a generous, disinterested, catholic spirit, and (a) abounding in love one towards another, and to all men. If others differ in opinion from us, let us not judge or despise them merely on that account, but whilst they walk by the same (b) rule that we do, and their lives appear to be Christian, let us say, 'Peace be on them, and on all the Israel of God (c).' If they judge or condemn us, merely because we differ from them, let us regard them rather as objects of our pity than of our resentment. They and we both must appear one day before the (d) judgment-seat of Christ.

We are now going to celebrate that ordinance which Jesus Christ hath instituted for the remembrance of himself, and which he intended, among other excellent purposes, to be an external token of the inward cord of union and fellowship of all his disciples, 'For we being many, says the apostle, are one bread, and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread (e).' Let us perform

(a) 1 Thess. iii. 12. (b) Phil. iii. 16. (c) Gal. vi. 16. (d) Rom. xiv. 10. (e) 1 Cor. x. 16, 17.

his service with Christian dispositions, and when though we may appear outwardly to be separated from many who are called Christians, we shall be truly ONE with all those in every communion, whom Jesus Christ will acknowledge for his disciples. For whatever multitude of separate churches and communions there may be in the Christian world, it is not to be doubted but Jesus hath 'his sheep' (a) in every fold, that is, men of a truly Christian temper and behaviour, who though they may be at a great distance from one another with regard to place, and often are unknown to each other, are nevertheless (b) well known to him, and who in fact all think the same things in the main, and are all united in promoting the great design of the gospel; which is the knowledge of truth, and the practice of righteousness, from the hope of immortality, without regard to (c) worldly interests. All these, wherever they are scattered upon the face of the earth, and however different they may seem in their outward forms and modes of worship, belong to 'the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven (d);' and they will all be brought together into ONE blessed society, in that 'day

(a) John x. 16, 27. (b) 2 Tim. ii. 19. Rev. ii. 2.  
John xv. 18, 19. xvii. 14, 16. (d) Heb. xii. 23.

When Jesus Christ shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired of all them that believe (a). With these men, my brethren, and like these men, let us communicate, at the same time that we communicate with one another, and thus truly our (b) fellowship shall be with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ! to whom be (c) blessing and honour, and glory and power, for ever and ever. Amen.

(a) 2 Thess. i. 10. (b) 1 John i. 3. (c) Rev. v. 13.

F I N I S.



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